



**Embassy of the United States of America
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**Opening Remarks
Ambassador Henry S. Ensher**

**African Union Kidnapping For Ransom (KFR) Workshop
February 4, 2014**

Centre Africain d'Études et de Recherche sur le Terrorisme (CAERT), Algiers

Ambassadors, distinguished guests, it is a pleasure to be with you this morning.

I want to thank Ambassador Madeira and the African Center for the Study and Research on Terrorism, Ambassador Rezag Bara and the Algerian Government for hosting this event. Thank you to the co-chairs of the Global Counterterrorism Forum's Sahel Region Capacity-Building Working Group – Algeria and Canada - for collaborating with the AU on this important initiative, and to all of the participants who made the trip to Algiers.

The U.S. government is pleased to support your efforts and is represented here today by the Departments of State, Treasury, and Justice. We encourage a government-wide or interagency approach to address the KFR phenomenon effectively, and welcome the opportunity to participate in the various sessions over the next few days.

I had the opportunity to participate in the GCTF KFR meeting last in April 2012 in Algiers where the KFR good practices were initially developed.

All of us here today, my Government, the UN Security Council, and the G8 have since endorsed those practices which were finalized in the “Algiers Memorandum” adopted at the GCTF Ministerial Meeting in December 2012. I'm very grateful to the Government of Algeria and to those from and outside the region that have traveled here today for their commitment to securing the implementation of the good practices contained in the Algiers Memorandum. The United States fully supports efforts to implement the Algiers Memorandum.

The UN Security Council, in its first-ever resolution on KFR last week (2133 (2014)), called on Member States to prevent terrorists from benefitting directly or indirectly from ransom payments

or from political concessions and to secure the safe release of hostages. The Council also recognizes the need to continue expert discussions on KFR within the UN and international and regional organizations. This workshop is an excellent occasion to do that. And it is the first in a series of four workshops the AU will organize in the next 12 months on this topic. These workshops reflect our shared commitment to put the Algiers Memorandum into practice.

We are here today because we are deeply committed to reducing terrorist groups' access to the funding that allows them to survive and recruit while protecting the lives of our nationals. Each of the countries represented here are all too familiar with terrorism and KFR and its effects on the safety and security of your people.

And allow me to express my government's concern for the safety and well-being of the Algerian diplomats who are held hostage. The United States strongly condemns the kidnapping and my government fully supports the Algerian government in its steadfast efforts to secure their safe return. Our hearts go out to the hostages and their families.

Al-Qa'ida in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) has established a reputation for kidnapping foreign visitors and tourists to North Africa and the Sahel to secure ransoms. AQIM derives the bulk of its funds from kidnapping-for-ransom, not from donors who support its violent acts. The tragic truth is that the ransom money that funds the livelihood of Al Qa'ida and its affiliates often comes from the countries that are dedicated to defeating the terrorist organization. KFR has become a growth industry and preferred terrorist tactic, and we must do what we can to reverse the trend.

KFR poses a threat to our citizens overseas, presents a national security threat by potentially funding terrorism, challenging political stability, and undermining regional economies. The Saharan tourism industry fears that foreigners will leave the region due to the worsening security situation at the country's borders. Our business leaders rightfully point out that kidnappings will negatively impact the tourism sector. AQIM-linked groups have kidnapped dozens of people for ransom over the last decade. These kidnappings have resulted in as much as a 99% drop in tourism in some towns. In sum, as we look broadly at the impact of KFR, we see it has proven to be detrimental to the security of our people and for business and development prospects of African countries.

A coordinated approach is needed to mitigate the threats posed by groups intent on hostage-taking. The United States encourages coordination within national boundaries through

interagency cooperation, and coordination regionally and internationally among our governments.

Algeria has shown itself to be a leader and to use its counterterrorism experience, resolve, and capacity to help mitigate and deny the benefits of KFR in the region. We understand that some countries have the will but have insufficient capacity to confront the terrorist threat. We encourage Algeria to expand its regional leadership role and transfer its know-how to members of the African Union who stand to benefit greatly. Algeria's central geographical location, willingness to share its expertise, provide training, and host regional exchanges like the KFR workshop help build the capacity of neighbors, which over time will provide greater stability in the Sahel and Maghreb. To effectively address terrorism, a strategic, long-term approach is crucial.

Given the scale of the problem, addressing the KFR threat requires not only bilateral but close regional and international coordination. We want to enhance cooperation on KFR and all aspects of counterterrorism with Algeria and with all the countries represented here today.

I am very pleased to see experts from around the region and the world, who bring their experience to improve communication and cooperation among us as we take on the practical application of the Algiers Memorandum.

We urge all countries to consider using the Algiers Memorandum's non-binding good practices. These practical tools will enhance the international effort to crack down on the use of KFR as a source of financing. The Memorandum is consistent with the U.S. non-concessions policy to the demands of hostage takers and our goal to bring them to justice.

The United States and all of you recognize that discussions in the next few days will also look at how to adapt and implement them in line with international law, including human rights law, as well as applicable domestic law.

Thank you who have traveled from other countries to participate in this workshop. The United States values your commitment and collaborative spirit for working together to defeat those who attempt KFR.

Thank you again for inviting me to participate.

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